

Assisted suicide rate in Canada continues to climb

The number of medically-assisted deaths in Canada rose by more than 25 per cent in 2019 and made up two per cent of all Canadian deaths last year, Health Canada's first annual report on Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada found.

In 2019, 5,631 Canadians chose to have an assisted death, 26.1-per-cent more deaths than reported the previous year, the report released late last month says.

The number of assisted deaths has risen each year since the practice was legalized in 2016, and by Dec. 31, 2019, 13,946 people had chosen to end their life with a doctor's assistance.

Overall, there were 7,336 written requests for an assisted suicide in 2019, but more than a quarter (26.5 per cent) did not result in a death. In more than half of those cases, the patient died before the procedure.

Patty Hajdu, Canada's minister of health, said the report used data collected under the new monitoring and reporting system of federal, provincial and territorial governments and health-care professionals put in place Nov. 1, 2018 to standardize data collection nationwide.

One thing missing in the report is abuse of the law that has taken place since assisted dying was legalized, said Alex Schadenberg, executive director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition. He notes the most recent Quebec euthanasia report which uncovered at least 13 deaths that did not comply with the law.

"The report does not attempt to uncover abuse of the law and it didn't track stories that were negative to euthanasia," said Schadenberg in a blog post.

The federal government earlier this year introduced Bill C-7 to open assisted dying up even further in response to the Quebec Superior Court's Truchon decision which struck down the current legislation. It removed the requirement that a person's death be reasonably foreseeable to qualify for assisted death, opening it up to people who are not terminally ill.